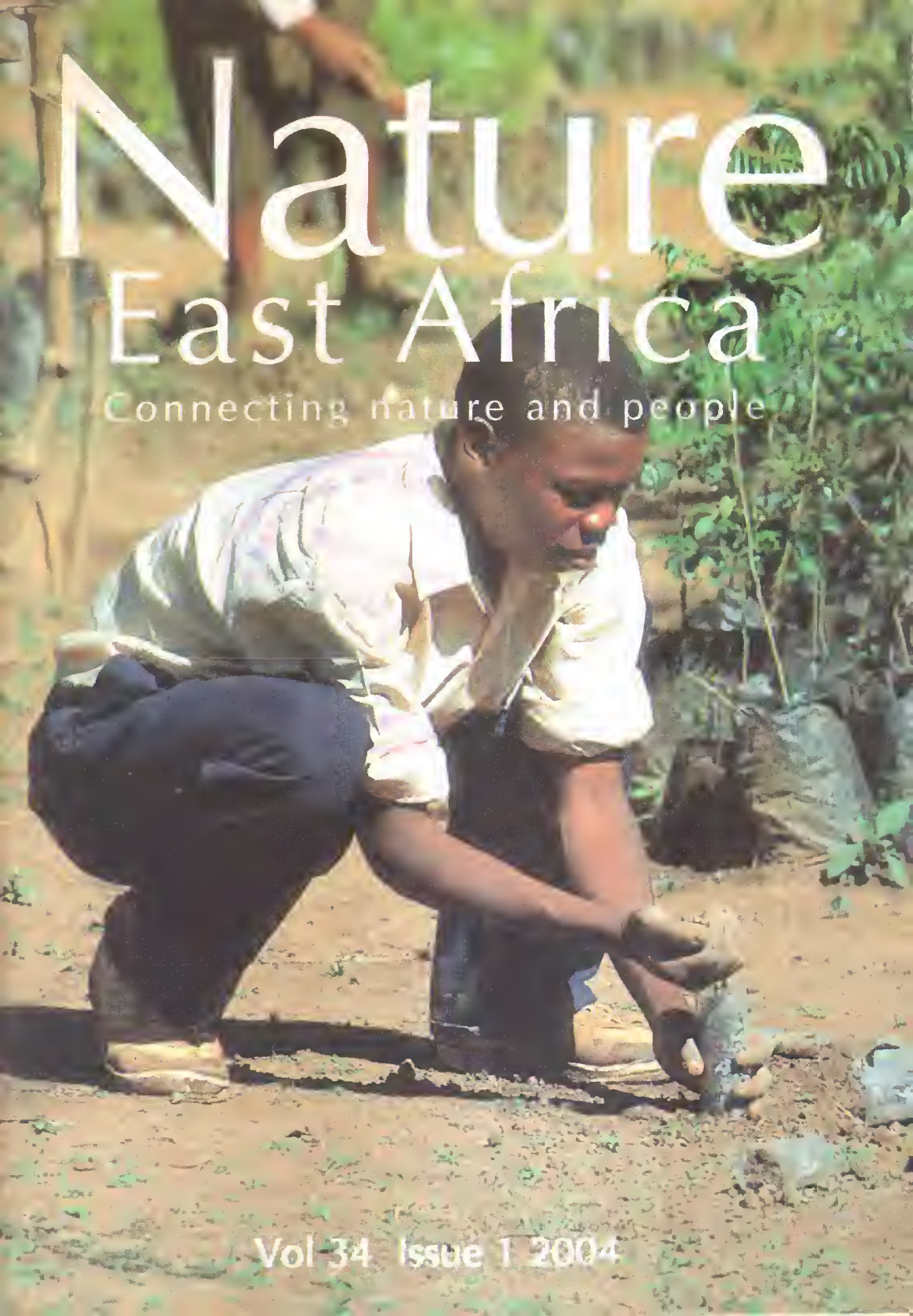

Vol 34 Issue 1 2004

RED DATA BIRD
The enigmatic Forest Owlet
Conservation of the Harpy Eagle in Panama
Longlining: a major threat to the world's seabirds

...With

Nature East Africa

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Special *Nature East Africa* Issue on
Site Support Groups Networking Project and Monitoring

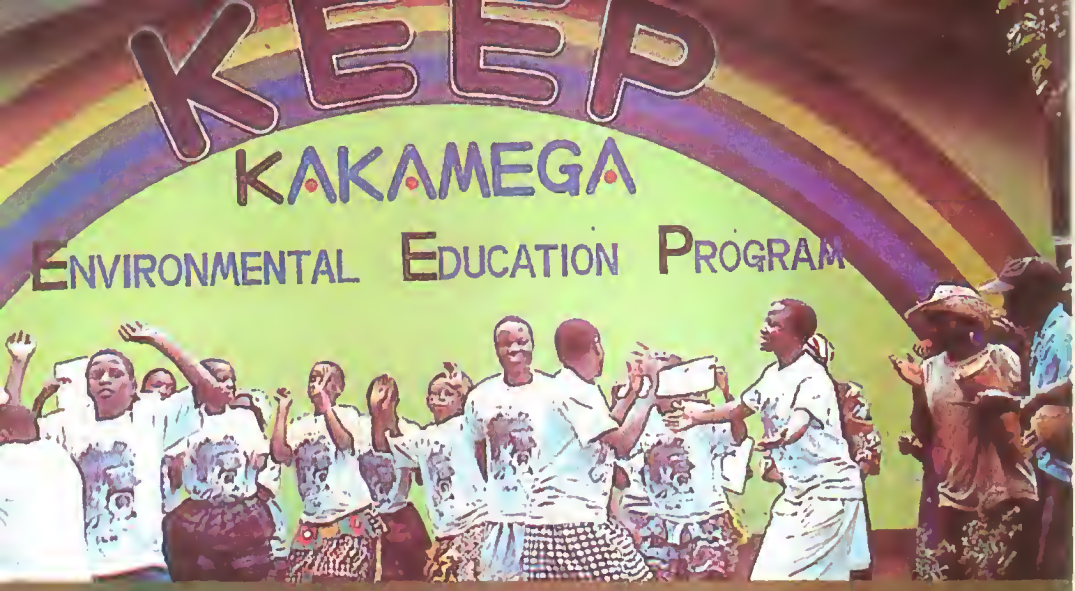
DARWIN INITIATIVE

RSPB

Dansk Ornitologisk Forening

projektrådgivningen

Cover Photo by G Shorrock of Kakamega Environment Education Programme member, potting seedlings



Welcome to a special edition of *Nature East Africa*

The conservation work of Nature Kenya has grown dramatically since 1998, in response to both the threats facing Kenya's unique biodiversity and the fortunate opportunities provided by our increasing professional capacity and by generous funding from a number of donors. The stimulus for this growth was the completion of the inventory of Important Bird Areas, a programme led by Leon Bennun and Peter Njoroge. This identified 60 of Kenya's most critical sites for biodiversity conservation, based around a globally applicable criteria of globally threatened, range restricted and congregatory bird species developed by BirdLife International.

Many of these Important Bird Areas are fully or partially protected, in particular by the efforts of Kenya Wildlife Service, Forest Department, National Museums of Kenya and by private owners. However around 25 of the sites have very little protection, and since formal protection is unlikely in the near future, new approaches to their conservation are required. At most of the sites, more work is needed to monitor the status of their biodiversity and the threats facing it, and more needs to be done to make local people surrounding the IBAs supportive of, participating in and benefiting from the proper protection and management of those sites. It was these urgent demands which led Nature Kenya to undertake a prioritisation of the most urgent areas and pilot the formation and strengthening of community based site support groups.

Eight excellent committed and increasingly self sufficient groups have since grown into strong supporters of Nature Kenya's conservation work. In all cases their membership is overwhelmingly local people who care about local nature and their environment. They see benefits to their communities in embarking on efforts to monitor the status of the wildlife, respond to threats arising, raise awareness among their friends and colleagues and develop new programmes to enhance livelihoods of their communities through well planned and sustainable resource based developments. Some are embarking on major funded programmes already, for example at Kinangop Plateau, where Nature Kenya has secured funds from IUCN Netherlands Committee to buy a small area of critically threatened highland grasslands.

The groups are still young and inexperienced and greatly in need of additional resources, training and above all support and sharing of their experiences. We were therefore so pleased when the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) agreed to fund a project through our BirdLife partner in Denmark (the Danish Ornithological Society) to establish a programme to strengthen the sharing and learning network of these site support groups. The project which runs until 2005 will enable the groups to meet annually and receive structured training in group development, project development and management. It will also provide communication materials, equipment and training for specific programmes, such as the emerging wool spinners group at Kinangop. Those subgroups will thus be in a better position to develop effective and sustainable income generating activities.

The groups' enthusiasm for their environment is also demonstrated by the enthusiasm with which a number have taken on the detailed monitoring of particular aspects of their environment. For example Mukurweini Environment Volunteers are tracking population changes in the endemic Hinde's Babbler, while Kijabe Environment Volunteers are assessing the number of illegal charcoal kilns. A project funded by the Darwin Initiative of the UK Government and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), our UK partner, has provided training and resources to assist these programmes, while the Department of Ornithology at NMK has given significant and much valued technical input.

The Darwin Initiative funds are actually supporting a much wider attempt to establish a network of basic monitoring throughout our IBAs. This would ensure that all sites receive a basic assessment each year in relation to the integrity of the site, the degree of threat facing it and the response in terms of conservation effort. The key to the success of this programme is to ensure that this effort is continued in the long term, and therefore it is essential that the agencies managing each site take responsibility for the monitoring. Thus, we have been busy engaging partners such as KWS and Forest Department in the process, and have been able to provide some limited training and resources to expedite this.

Both capacity building and monitoring are essential for the future of Kenya's IBAs and the communities supporting them. Information from monitoring will inform management plans and conservation interventions. The capacity of the SSGs will be greatly enhanced by the support and networking provided. We are very grateful to the UK Government's Darwin Initiative and to DANIDA for supporting these programmes, and to our BirdLife partners in UK and Denmark for facilitating them. This special edition of *Nature East Africa* attempts to show some of the exciting activities behind these headlines and to show more widely how Nature Kenya's and partners' efforts to protect these critical sites are beginning to bear fruit. Please read on and if you feel able to help, we would love to hear from you.

Paul Matiku
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Kenya's Important Bird Areas (IBAs)

Nature Kenya published *Important Bird Areas in Kenya* by Bennun and Njoroge in 1999. The sixty sites, which meet global criteria relating to threatened species, concentrations of species restricted in range and congregations of birds, include world famous national parks and forest reserves. Others such as the central montane grasslands and coastal Kaya forests are less well known and less well protected. Overall 25 sites are not protected or only partly protected. *(See IBA map on page 39)*

Site Support Groups (SSGs)

On a number of these sites, community based groups of concerned individuals, the Site Support Groups, have formed and are taking the lead in protecting the sites and monitoring their biodiversity. *(See list of SSGs on page 40)*

The Mustard Seed Story!

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It's a story that started around five years ago, with a few fledging groups who were then constituted as 'self-help' or 'youth groups' without clear objectives or goals. They had some general concern about their local environment and welfare. At the Coast, field research assistants and others knowledgeable on various species at Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, constituted themselves into an association. A similar guides group evolved in Kakamega Forest, which also started a school educational programme. At the Kikuyu Escarpment a group of fresh graduates decided to use their time to help their communities. At Kinangop, a professional tour guide from the area with a passion for birds decided to engage youth and farmers in conserving a threatened local bird.

The Nature Kenya strategy is to work with self-constituted community groups rather than constitute fresh ones as they would have the undesirable tag of being 'donor driven' and devoid of local ownership and support. Using this strategy, Nature Kenya proceeded to seek out such groups, engage their interest and through constant consultations and dialogue, incorporate them into a 'Site Support Group' (SSG) network. Nature Kenya has over time built their capacities in various fields such as fundamentals of ornithology, group management and leadership, visioning, objective-setting and conflict-resolution.

Community gathering, on a cold September morning, at the launch of the Kikuyu Escarpment conservation project

Site Support Group members, from around the country, in group discussion at an experience sharing workshop

It has, of course, not always been smooth sailing with obstacles encountered from time to time, and especially as the groups started to grow and consolidate. Some of the more notable 'teething problems' have been internal group wrangles, especially on leadership issues, inadequate capacity to take on some of the local conservation challenges, apathy within their own local communities and pressing social and economic hardships. The whole idea of social responsibility and volunteering took a considerable while to be fully appreciated and practised. A common initial reaction has always been 'what's in it for me?' According to Solomon Ngari Mwangi, the Conservation Programme Manager, who has been working with the groups from the beginning, it was a *'discovery as opposed to a design approach'.*

From the first 3 or so groups, like the proverbial mustard seed story, 12 SSGs now exist across the country from the Coast at Arabuko-Sokoke, through to Mount Kenya, Mukurweini, Kikuyu Escarpment and Kinangop, across the Rift Valley to the Nandi Hills, then Kakamega Forest and at the shores of Lake Victoria. Their main focus has been working with their respective local communities to stimulate interest, acting as agents of change, raising awareness, taking action for conservation of biodiversity, particularly on threatened species and habitats. The process of group evolution and development that has been developed by Nature Kenya with the SSGs, is now being replicated (as a best practice) across the continent throughout the Africa BirdLife International Partnership.

A parallel campaign has been the initiation and promotion of environmentally friendly income-generating activities. With technical support from Nature Kenya, most of these groups have been able to attract donor funding and government support to implement a number of innovative projects at community level. Some notable examples include butterfly farming at Kakamega Forest, ecotourism at Mt. Kenya and Arabuko-Sokoke Forests and wool spinning at Kinangop.

Monitoring team outside the Kakamega Environment Education Programme

Friends of Kinangop Plateau office at Murungaru

The UK Minister for Environment Sir Eliot Morley, and Kijabe Environment Volunteers in October 2003, during the WORLDBIRDWATCH event.

The SSGs recently gathered in Nairobi to evaluate and appraise their growth and development. The groups rated their performance on a number of issues as indicated below (**Rating/Scores**: 1= Poor; 2=Good; 3=Very Good).

Despite the good ratings, inadequate financial resources, increasing social demands, rural poverty, inadequate capacities (knowledge and skills) and lack of enabling environment were cited as bottlenecks to progress.

Nature Kenya with support from DANIDA has launched an initiative that is building on the various strengths and experiences of each group, for the benefit of the network. For instance, Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO) working around the Kikuyu Escarpment Forests, have been quite prolific in attracting both donor and Government support for their programmes and activities. Their efforts have yielded the formation of an umbrella group 'Kereita Forest and Wildlife Conservation Association' (KFWCA) and the development of a site management plan for the escarpment. Their experience in these areas is invaluable for other SSGs who have not been able to succeed in this field. Likewise, Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FOKP), the first SSG to be established, has expanded over the vast plateau with four well-established branches governed by a Joint Management Committee (JMC). The group has been able to evolve under this model structure, albeit with initial hiccups, into a well-managed and efficient community action group. Their experience in group leadership, management and governance has provided useful pointers to other growing SSGs who might find themselves in similar circumstances. The Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides Association (ASFGA) have established themselves as a professional guide outfit offering quality services to visiting tourists. The DANIDA funding will provide for capacity building workshops, group exchanges and improved communication amongst groups.

As a SSG network, the groups have been able to make contributions to international policy making processes and prepared a joint statement to the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in South Africa in 2002. Nature Kenya hopes to consolidate this model network of community action groups by providing opportunities for further development through experience-sharing and capacity building.

Targets

	Award/Scores
Sensitising local communities	2
Reporting destructive activities	3
Rural forestry extension	3
Diversifying activities and involving the wider communities	3
Developing and running Environmental education	2
Taking the lead as Nature ambassadors	1.5 (1-2)
Active participation in Habitat restoration & rehabilitation	2
Average Score	**2.4**

Improving performance

Communication	
a). Within groups	1.5 (1-2)
b). Between groups	2
Setting up appropriate Management structures	3
Ensuring Commitment and membership retention	2
Members awareness and education	2.5 (2-3)
Engaging actively in Fundraising	1.5 (1-2)
Average Score	**2.1**

Yala Swamp

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Yala Swamp is on the northeastern shore of Lake Victoria. It is of considerable significance as a biological and environmental resource not only for Kenya, but also for the East African region. As the largest single mass of papyrus swamp in Kenya it is identified as one of Kenya's 60 Important Bird Areas (IBA). The Yala Swamp complex holds eight out of nine Lake Victoria Basin Biome species of birds. The Papyrus Yellow Warbler, Carruthers' Cisticola, White-winged Warbler and Papyrus Canary are all endemic to the papyrus habitat, while the Papyrus Yellow Warbler is further listed as threatened worldwide.

Birds aside, Lake Kanyaboli, which is part of the Yala Swamp, is a vital refuge for the remnant populations of *Cichlid* fish that may be extinct in Lake Victoria following the introduction of the Nile Perch *Lates niloticus* in the 1970s. These remnant populations include *Oreochromis esculentus*, an economically important tilapia and *Haplochromis* species. The lake is also a refuge and nursery for *Protopterus aethiopicus* and *Clarias mossambicus*, *Labeo victorianus*, *Synodontis victoriae*, *Synodontis afrofischeri*, *Mormyrus spp* and *Barbus spp*. The forbidding nature of the Yala Swamp has formed a natural barrier that has prevented the Nile perch from penetrating Lake Kanyaboli.

Unfortunately, there is remarkably little documented information about the Yala Swamp Complex and its environs apart from the occasional and sometimes anecdotal press report. Current information covering the ecology and conservation status of Lake Kanyaboli is far from comprehensive. The current rate of lake based resource use appears to be largely unsustainable particularly in view of the increasing numbers of people living in proximity to the swamp. This suggests an absence of regulation, and a lack of information at the policy level.

Map of the Yala Swamp Complex

Geography

Located between Usenge in Siaya District and Port Victoria in Busia District, the Yala Swamp complex covers some 65 km^2 and is comprised of a papyrus swamp and two satellite lakes, Kanyaboli and Sare. The complex contains a now-reclaimed swamp and a range of hills to the east. To the north is the small and seasonal Hwiro River and towards the southern border is the feeder canal from Yala River. A silt-clay dyke cuts Lake Kanyaboli off from a feeder canal bringing water from Yala River and another reclaimed portion, which gives way to the main body of the Yala Swamp.

Lake Kanyaboli & Natural Resource Uses

The human population density around Yala Swamp is quite high owing to prime agricultural land situated around the shores, the water itself and the fish resources in the lake. The water is used for drinking, laundry, cooking, bathing, swimming, watering livestock, building mud houses and for irrigation. With the Rural Electrification Scheme, there are now plans to install a major water pump on the shore of Lake Kanyaboli, to supply water to the local schools and shopping centres as well as homes. Although this might be good for rural development, it might on the other hand open up the swamp area for further development, encroach on wild habitat and overuse natural resources.

There is almost total dependence on fishing from the lake among the people who live near Lake Kanyaboli. The fish are utilised both for subsistence and in exchange for money, grains and vegetables at the local markets. The main consumptive and commercial species are - Lungfish *Protopterus aethiopicus* popularly known at Kanyaboli as Kamongo and Nile Tilapia *Oreochromis esculentus*.

The area has several types of vegetation that are frequently used by the local population. *Papyrus*, which is the main vegetation, is an important raw material for thatching, roof and wall construction and mat making. It is an alternative source of domestic fuel and is used in making bags, baskets, straw hats, rafts for crossing the lake, cattle sheds, fish traps, brooms, basket chairs and fencing material. Another sedge, found in seasonally flooded and marshy areas, is also used to make floor mats, trays, fruit bowls, brooms, baskets, caps and basket chairs. It is also an important cattle fodder and like papyrus, a source of fuel to substitute firewood. Woody plants provide firewood when dry while others bear edible leaves or fruits. The stronger and more malleable ones are used to make cane chairs and walking sticks. There are also plants with medicinal value but most of these are endemic and rare, as such there is danger of over-exploitation as traditional cures gain popularity

There are non-tangible benefits of the swamp complex as well. These include the swamp's aesthetic values, its function as a biodiversity refuge, and environmental services of water storage and filtering; flood control; soil conservation and windbreak. Further, recreation on Lake Kanyaboli is centred on the landing beaches where travellers stop over to relax. Recreational opportunities include boating, bird watching and leisure excursions by individuals or organised groups.

The marsh and swamp vegetation filter and store the agro-chemicals from upstream farms, cleaning the water before it enters the lakes. The bush and shrubs provide cover to the soil against wind and water erosion and enhance rainwater infiltration and absorption. From plant leaf falls, and wood and animal tissue decomposition, the soil obtains humus, which boosts soil fertility and makes it better for local agriculture.

Survey team ventures into the Papyrus

Boats on Lake Kanyaboli

Threats to Lake Kanyaboli

Lake Kanyaboli used to receive its water directly from Yala River, but following efforts to reclaim Yala Swamp, Yala River was diverted directly into the main swamp and a silt-clay dyke now cuts off Lake Kanyaboli. The original feeder canal from the river into the lake is in a state of disrepair although the Lake Basin Development Authority is now trying to repair it. Lake Kanyaboli lacks a sufficient input of fresh water, and has a low concentration of dissolved oxygen. The lake is also fairly sheltered by the papyrus fringe, which reduces the scale of water mixing by wind and increases thermal stratification. Shelter and the increasing level of agrochemical use around the lake's shores, has increased the lake's conductivity and turbidity.

Where the shores of Lake Kanyaboli are not protected by swamps, most of the residue from the use of agro-chemicals such as fertilizers, herbicides and acaricides are washed down into the lake. Organic waste from homes, together

with nitrates and phosphatic fertilizers, enriches the lake and causes algae blooms, eutrophication and falling levels of dissolved oxygen. This is a continuing threat to aerobic aquatic species - the nocturnal primary production and primary consumption have been affected and the entire food web in the ecosystem is distorted. Some chemical components such as those from detergents may contain heavy metals like mercury and copper. These metals have been known to bio-accumulate in aquatic food chains when they are ingested by invertebrates, move through fish and amphibians, birds and possibly mammals including humans.

Poor agricultural practices such as ploughing along the slopes, clearing land through burning and cutting down trees result in siltation. Consequently, the swamp has continued to expand outward and into Lake Kanyaboli. Some undesirable effects include the reduction in lake depth and volume - making the shoreline prone to flooding, increasing the lake's turbidity - thereby reducing light penetration and diminishing primary productivity, and the direct choking of fish from silt accumulation in fish gills.

Lake Victoria Basin biome birds found a Yala Swamp

Black-lored Babbler *Turdoides sharpei*

White-winged Warbler *Bradypterus carpalis*

Papyrus Yellow Warbler *Chloropeta gracilirostris*

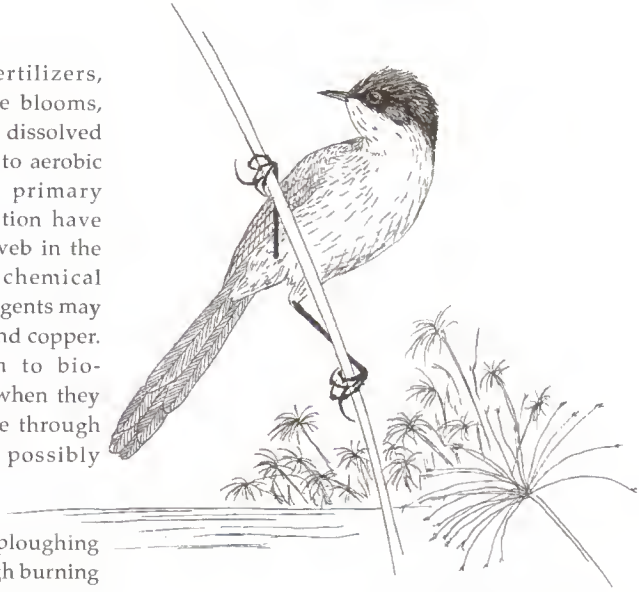
Carruthers' Cisticola *Cisticola carruthersi*

Papyrus Gonolek *Laniarius mufumbiri*

Red-chested Sunbird *Nectarinia erythrocerca*

Northern Brown-throated Weaver *Ploceus castanops*

Papyrus Canary *Serinus koliensis*



Papyrus Yellow Warbler
by Edwin Selempo

A further negative agricultural practice is the large-scale official reclamation programme of rice growing. As it resumes, potential ecological repercussions include further alterations to the vegetation structure, exposure of species to predation and disturbance, and acceleration of nutrient leaching in the soil thereby achieving the exact opposite of what is intended!

Fishing in the pools and lakes in the swamp is poorly controlled even as the Fisheries Department tries to impose an annual seasonal ban to help restock the fish in the lakes. The Department does not have an office close to the swamp and the officials from Siaya Town have to try and enforce the fishing by-laws. Fishermen take advantage of these logistical difficulties to fish indiscriminately. For this reason, it is rather difficult to ascertain the actual fish yields from the lake or to compute the actual minimum sustainable fish yield.

Lack of co-ordination, networking and information sharing among scientists studying the ecological interactions in the Yala Swamp has made it difficult to develop any database that would make it easy to understand and appraise future trends and developments.

The Future of Lake Kanyaboli

As local people continue to settle in this sensitive area, the population and its livestock will become increasingly vulnerable to diseases and pests. Population encroachment has caused human-wildlife conflicts including crop damage by hippopotamuses and primates as well as the predation of livestock by birds of prey and carnivores. Small-scale horticulture is gaining in momentum and fringe vegetation is often slashed, burned and the ground cultivated. New landing points are created to provide access by boat and to water the livestock. These activities are direct threats particularly to the *Papyrus* endemic birds but also small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects. The rate of human settlement around the lake is increasing leading to a correspondingly higher rate of resource exploitation.

Negative aspects aside the swamp has enormous unexploited potential for tourism, recreation and sport. It also enjoys a particularly strategic location to play a pivotal role in the western Kenya tour circuit. Among others, the swamp and its satellite lakes can support tourism related activities including bird watching, nature walks, boating safaris, camping or back packing and sport fishing. The *Papyrus* and other wetland vegetation are rapidly regenerating wetland plants that are capable of supporting the already budding local basket and curio industry for the domestic as well as export market. This vegetation could be harvested sustainably and marketed through co-operative societies run by the local women. An interpretive centre for the culture of the local people may also be established in the neighbourhood of the swamp as part of the effort to promote awareness about the local culture to visiting tourists. All these would contribute towards supplementing local income.

Officials from Lake Basin Development Authority say that any reclamation of Yala Swamp will be done in stages. They have started in the old maize-growing sites which had been abandoned. After five years they will assess the impact on the biodiversity. If there are no serious concerns they will then expand to other areas.

The Lake Victoria Sunset Birders (LVSB)

LVSB is the local Site Support Group in the region. They are operating within the Lake Victoria Wetlands basin, but based around the Dunga Swamp IBA in Kisumu. They have been very actively involved in promoting wetland conservation awareness among the local people and have a birdwatching eco-tourism project. The LVSB has been trained by Nature Kenya on basic wetland monitoring techniques to keep track of the changes in populations and habitat of the papyrus-endemic birds.

The Group is now extending its activities to the Yala Swamp itself, where they have begun to train a new local SSG in similar monitoring and eco-tourism initiatives.

Did you know? ...

A Hamerkop (also called a Hammerhead) is sometimes referred to as the King of Birds. This is partly due to the great lengths to which the Hamerkop goes in the construction of its nest. The completed nest may be up to 3 metres high and weigh up to 100 kg. It may take 3 months to complete the nest and the bird may use all sorts of things including, bones, bits of cloth, snake sloughs, dead birds, and human hair. The entrance to the nest is almost always on the underside and for some reason, always faces east.

Wool-Spinning promotes Grassland conservation

Kinangop Grasslands

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On the cool and peaceful plateaus on the western side of the Aberdare Mountain range are the Kinangop grasslands, which stretch from the edge of the escarpment to the forests of the mountain range. 'Kinangop', a Maasai name for place of fog and mist, was a bartering trade point for the Agikuyu and Maasai people. In the 1900s British settlers, attracted by the climate and scenic views of the Great Rift Valley, occupied these stretches of grassland and called them 'the White Highlands'. They kept sheep and cattle, as was the tradition in similar conditions in the United Kingdom, and they employed the Agikuyu people living on the southeast areas of the plateau, to tend to their stocks.

With the British settlers the Kinangop landscape slowly began its transformation into a mosaic of woodlots, crops and pastures. After independence much of the land was taken over, through land buying schemes, by the former labourers who continued the practice of animal husbandry. Kinangop became very famous in Kenya for milk production and wool supply. In the 1990s, the situation changed when the national dairy creamery (Kenya Co-operative Creameries) collapsed and could no longer sustain the milk business for farmers countrywide. This drastically affected the farming practices in Kinangop, where farmers now cultivate crops. Fields of potatoes, cabbages, pigeon peas and maize, occasionally with woodlots, now characterise the farms of Kinangop. The only areas that still retain large plots of grassland are around Engineer town and the extreme south at Nyakio/Magumu.

Kinangop's landscape is generally flat, sloping gently upwards to the base of the Aberdare Mountains, but dissected by valleys bearing streams that drain into the Malewa and Karati Rivers.

The plateau was once almost entirely tussocky grassland, including many tussock bogs in the valleys. Characteristic tussock grasses include *Andropogon amethystinus, Cymbopogon nardus, Digitaria diagonalis, Eleusine jaegeri, Eragrostis botryodes, Hyparrhenia hirta, H. tamba* and *Pennisetum hohenackeri.*

Surveys conducted by the Ornithology Department of National Museums of Kenya in 1994 through to 1997 found that Kinangop hosts a globally threatened species of bird found nowhere else in the world called Sharpe's Longclaw *Macronyx sharpei.* This bird is entirely dependent on the grassy tussocks for foraging and breeding. Other regionally threatened species of birds found here include Jackson's Widowbird, Long-tailed Widowbird and the Pallid Harrier. Two frog species *Hyperolius montanus* and *Phrynobatrachus kinangopensis* and a snake, the Kenya Horned Viper *Bitis worthingtonii,* have also been found to exist only in the highland grassland region. Many of the grasses and herbaceous plants are also confined to this high plateau habitat, and may be disappearing without ever having been properly studied.

Nature Kenya's conservation strategy is creating partnerships for conservation by building the capacity of local groups. These groups are able to undertake various activities like awareness raising, birdwatching, group management, monitoring of species and habitat and development of projects at the local level. At Kinangop, Nature Kenya is working with the Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FoKP) a local Self-Help Group that has contributed enormously to spreading awareness to the larger community on the unique biodiversity of Kinangop.

The partnership is developing a wool-spinning and weaving project that will improve livelihoods through the sale of wool products, such as mats, hats, scarfs, socks, gloves and a variety of toys. The aim of this initiative is to give incentive to farmers to keep larger flocks of sheep, who will then need more pastures. With checks to avoid overgrazing, this will favour the grassland birds extremely well since more tussock grass for foraging and breeding will be retained.

Nature Kenya with generous support from BirdLife Denmark and DANIDA will support members of FoKP to be trained on how to produce quality products and manage the business professionally. The support will also help to improve on the basic equipment for the workshop, which will contribute to improved capacity of the Friends in reaching out to more farmers through increased demand for raw wool and marketing of the finished products to urban centres.

The most effective way to ensure the long-term conservation of species and habitats is by connecting conservation with benefit sharing for communities and this is the vision for the wool spinning initiative of Kinangop.

Did you know? ...

Kenya has 24 globally threatened birds: 2 critically endangered, 9 endangered, 13 vulnerable (plus 3 data deficient and 16 near-threatened) according to the book *Threatened Birds of the World,* published in 2000.

Wool spinners at Kinangop South

Securing a Future for Sharpe's Longclaw

Sharpe's Longclaw in the hand

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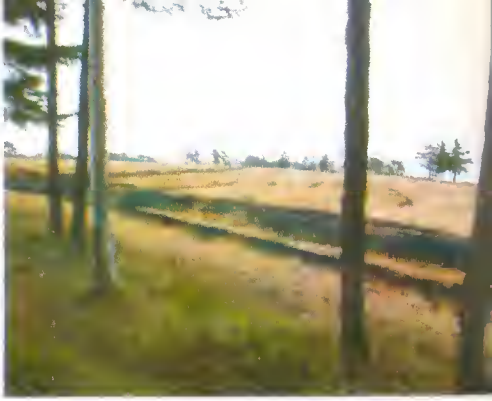
The first ever Endemic Species Nature Reserve in Africa will soon be a reality with the purchase of land on the Kinangop Plateau. With support from the IUCN-SPN Netherlands the long-term goal is to help ensure the conservation of the Kinangop Plateau's unique grassland biodiversity, particularly the endemic and globally threatened Sharpe's Longclaw Macronyx sharpei.

Kinangop Flora and Fauna

While Kinangop grasslands are the world's stronghold of Sharpe's Longclaw other endemic birds that may be found here include the Aberdare Cisticola *Cisticola aberdare*, which is thought to occur in the higher parts of the plateau, close to the Aberdare Mountains. Localised bird species include Black-winged Plover *Vanellus melanopterus*, Wing-snapping Cisticola *Cisticola ayresii*, the near-threatened Jackson's Widowbird *Euplectes jacksoni* and Long-tailed Widowbird *E. progne*. The restricted-range Hunter's Cisticola *Cisticola hunteri* is commonly found in scrubby areas, especially along river valleys.



Large numbers of migratory birds from Europe and Asia use the area on passage, notably the near-threatened Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Eurasian Swift *Apus apus*, Eurasian Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* and Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*.

Very few large wild mammals survive on the Kinangop Plateau, but many smaller species that are confined to highland grasslands can be found. Other flora and fauna of these grasslands have been little studied, but are thought to be highly specialised and restricted in range (*See Wool Spinning Promotes Grassland Conservation article pg. 13*).

Threats to the Grasslands

Sharpe's Longclaw, is restricted to the highland grasslands of Kenya, which are considerably diminished. This bird occurs almost exclusively on privately-owned grasslands, which are under severe pressure to convert to agriculture.

Settlement by smallholder agriculturalists has resulted in continuing reduction in the extent and quality of the habitat, so that the Sharpe's Longclaw has a very small and highly fragmented range. Due to unreliable payments by large-scale milk purchasers and climate changes that have reduced frost occurrence, crop production is now favoured over livestock rearing. On the Kinangop, grasslands now cover 50% of the plateau, and only 30% of these are tussock grasslands, which Sharpe's Longclaw needs to roost and breed. Around 60% of the tussock grasslands are highly fragmented since they are found within small (2 - 10 ha) parcels of land subdivided among small-scale farmers (*See 'Some vital statistics for Kinangop grasslands, an Important Bird Area' by Kairuki Ndang'ang'a and Wanyoike Wamiti, in Kenya Birds Vol 10 2002*). The unpalatable tussock-grass is often directly removed and pastures are ploughed every few years to keep tussocks from re-establishing.

The Value of the Reserve

This new reserve will be owned by Nature Kenya, who will hold the land in trust for conservation and provide technical support for the Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FoKP), a local conservation group, who will manage the reserve and employ a warden.

In order to fulfill its functions for conservation, demonstration and income-generation several considerations were taken into account. The reserve would need to form part of a larger matrix of suitable grasslands and hold, or be capable of holding, a healthy population of Sharpe's Longclaw and other grassland species.

Farm activity above and left

The reserve would need to be easily accessible from major roads at all times of the year and be scenically attractive to facilitate the development of ecotourism activities. It also should be close to the base of one of the three sub-groups of the Friends of Kinangop Plateau. Taking all these considerations into account, the likeliest location was in the north-central part of the plateau, on the escarpment edge near the town of Murungaru.

An 18-ha (45 acre) piece of land has been identified which will provide a suitable breeding habitat for at least ten pairs of Sharpe's Longclaw. It is also a suitable 'source' site for other species of grassland animals and plants to colonise other grassland patches. It is hoped that it will be a model for conservation-friendly land management, and for encouraging schools and other public institutions to set aside similar nature reserves. The reserve will be a means for conservation education and awareness-raising amongst land-owners and schools' environmental clubs. Finally, it is anticipated that the reserve will be an attraction for birdwatchers and other eco-tourists and provide a sustainable source of revenue for managing the reserve and other activities of the Friends of Kinangop Plateau.

Grazing is necessary to maintain the preferred habitat of Sharpe's Longclaw - patches of short grass and tussock. Tussock grasses tend to be avoided by cattle, helping to maintain this varied habitat structure. As a management and income-generating tool, the reserve will be stocked with a manageable number of livestock. Preliminary economic studies show that amongst competing land-uses, properly managed dairy farming at relatively low stocking rates, is likely to provide the best long-term economic returns. Tussock grass also provides an emergency fodder in drought years and it is therefore in local farmers' best interests to maintain some tussock cover. The new reserve and the resource centre will be used as a demonstration site for such practices.

The reserve is expected to be established before the end of 2004.

Above are Murungaru officers at their office, meeting with a donor representative

Local People Contributing to Science

SIMON MUSILA
kbirds@africaonline.co.ke

Monitoring training workshop at Kakamega Forest attended by government officials and community members

A whole new world of ecological interactions is suddenly open to the participants of a programme which is training community members in monitoring biodiversity.

At the Kinangop Grassland IBA, for instance, participants have found out that Sharpe's Longclaw relies on grass of specific height and tussock density, for survival. They are making observations of eggs, and chicks in the nest, which they photograph and report.

Continued on page 23

Help to monitor Kenya's Important Bird Areas (IBAs) for biodiversity conservation

Please answer the questions below and attach any additional information or pages. Guidelines are circulated with this form. Please give details and quantify changes wherever possible. All information is helpful, at any time. However, if you are resident at a site or a regular visitor, try to return a completed form **once each year.**

Please return the completed form to Nature Kenya at the address on page 21 (an e-mail version of this form is available - just request one from Nature Kenya).

1. Name of the IBA (please use a new form for each site)

2. Today's date

3. Your name:

4. Your postal address:

telephone/fax:
e-mail:

5. Does this form cover (a) the whole IBA or (b) just part of the IBA? (tick one)
If (b), which part / how much of the whole area?

6. Are you resident at the IBA? (a) Yes (b) No
If (b) — what was the date and duration of the visit(s) you are reporting on?

— what was the purpose of your visit(s)?

7. Please summarise the **current** status of the natural habitat in the IBA, based on your observations and information, by circling a score from 1 to 4 below:
1 Largely intact and undisturbed
2 Slight decline in habitat area or quality
3 Substantial decline in habitat area or quality
4 Severe decline in habitat area or quality

8. Please summarise the level of immediate **future** threats to the IBA, based on your observations and information, by circling a score from 1 to 4 following:
1 No obvious immediate threats
2 Slight
3 Substantial
4 Severe

9. Please give any further information and details that you think may be helpful. Please attach or send more sheets or other documents/reports if necessary. **There is no need to answer all the questions or fill in all the tables** — please just put down the information that you have available. If possible, please attach a MAP (a copy of a topographical map, or a simple sketch map) showing the location/extent of the threats/actions that you identify, and the location of any records.

i. Current status
(a) **General comments:**

(b) **Specific changes.** Please give information in the table below on the extent and rate of recent change (state the period) – provide numbers wherever possible

Scores for changes

-3	Large decline
-2	Moderate decline
-1	Slight decline
–	Decline (unknown extent)
0	No change
+1	Small improvement
+2	Moderate improvement
+3	Large improvement
+	Improvement (unknown extent)
U	Not assessed
N/a	Not applicable

Name of IBA		
Period assessed		
From:	**To:**	
	Score	
Habitat area		
Habitat quality		
Bird populations		
(specify species/groups)		
Other (use separate page for details)		

Threat class (use separate page to give details)	Intensity	Trend	Explanation
Abandonment/reduction of land management			
Agricultural intensification/expansion			
Aquaculture/fisheries			
Burning of vegetation			
Consequences of animal/plant introductions			
Construction/impact of dyke/dam/barrage			
Deforestation (commercial)			
Disturbance to birds			
Drainage			
Dredging/canalization			
Extraction industry			
Filling-in of wetlands			
Firewood collection			
Forest grazing			
Groundwater abstraction			
Industrialization/urbanization/infrastructure/intensified forest management			
Natural events			
Recreation/tourism			
Selective logging/cutting			
Shifting agriculture			
Unsustainable exploitation			
Other (please specify)			

ii. Threats/conservation issues:

(a) **General comments:**

(b) **Specific threats**: Please assess the intensity of the threat, whether this is increasing, decreasing, or stable, and give details or comments to explain your assessment. Please give quantitative information as far as possible. The threats of chief concern are those that may affect the bird species for which the IBA is listed – including overflying migrant species.

Codes for intensity of threat

A	High
B	Medium
C	Low
U	Unknown
N/a	Not applicable

Codes for trend of threat

-	Threat decreasing
0	Threat stable
+	Threat increasing
U	Unknown
N/a	Not applicable

Actions/responses	Score	Explanation	Details
Legal protected area status			
% of IBA under legal protection			
Establishment of local conservation group(s)			
Number of local conservation groups			
Number of local conservation group members			
Activities of local conservation groups			
Development of site action plan			
Implementation of action plan			
General management and policing			
Resource use controls/quotas			
Eco-tourism initiatives[a]			
Visitor numbers[a]			
Number of conservation staff and volunteers			
Revenue generated from site			
Surveys and research			
Conservation projects/actions: planned			
Conservation projects/actions: implemented			
Advocacy/interventions for site			
Publicity generated for site			
Environmental Impact Assessments			
Mitigation measures implemented			
Other (specify):			

iii. Conservation actions/responses
(a) **General comments:**

(b) **Specific actions or responses**: Please assess each action or response (improving, declining, no change, not applicable) and give details or comments to explain your assessment. Please give quantitative information as far as possible.

Score: + improving, – declining, 0 no change, N/a not applicable

[a]Note that the conservation effects of increased eco-tourism and visitor numbers are not always positive – please explain your rating

iv. Interesting bird records, population estimates, lists or other details

v. Records, population estimates, lists or details for other fauna or flora

vi. Useful contacts (for research projects, site conservation groups, tourism initiatives, etc.)

vii. Other notes

10. Send to Nature Kenya:

P. O. Box 44486 GPO

00100 NAIROBI

Email: office@naturekenya.org

Help to monitor Kenya's Important Bird Areas (IBAs) for biodiversity conservation

Guidelines for filling the report form

We welcome up-to-date information on any IBAs. This allows us to keep the IBA database up to date and correct errors, and to monitor changes and take appropriate conservation action.

IBAs are shown on the map on page 38. The IBAs are listed and described in the book 'Important Bird Areas of Kenya' (EANHS 1999).

All information is helpful, at any time. However, if you are resident at a site or a regular visitor, please try to return a completed form **once each year**.

Some parts of the form are quite detailed. **Please try to fill in all sections on Page 19. The other sections are optional**: do not worry about leaving some or all questions blank if you do not have relevant information.

IMPORTANT: If possible, please attach a MAP (a copy of a topographical map, or a simple sketch map) showing the location and extent of the threats, actions or records you identify.

Current status. Please give any information on changes in condition or biodiversity value: e.g. the extent and quality of habitat, wildlife populations (birds, other animals, plants), water levels ...

Threats. Please assess and explain existing or potential threats, or other conservation concerns. The table lists the classes of threats recorded in the IBA database: please specify if you have new information on any of these or on additional threats.

Conservation actions/responses. Please assess and explain any changes in legal status, management, planning, local conservation activity, research, conservation projects, etc. The table lists classes of actions and responses recorded in the IBA database: please specify if you have new information on any of these. Some particular areas for attention are:

Conservation projects. Are there any recent conservation projects or interventions — how successful have these been and are any actions planned? *Contact names and addresses would be helpful.*

Research projects. Are there any recent or planned research projects at the site that may be relevant to its conservation (e.g. dealing with fauna, flora, ecology, conservation biology or socio-economics)? Please give details here, including if possible:

- Project name
- Who is carrying it out (contact names and addresses would be useful)
- Where are the researcher(s) affiliated?
- What are the project's objectives?
- What are its findings or results, if available?

Local Site Conservation Groups. Do you know of any **active local** groups that have been formed on or around the site, and that participate in conservation activities? If so, please tell us:

- What type(s) of group(s) are they? (e.g. women's groups; youth groups; school clubs; societies; NGOs)
- The names of the groups and their activities.
- Names and addresses of appropriate contact persons.

Tourism developments. Are efforts being made to develop tourism facilities or activities? Is tourism having any obvious positive or negative effects?

Other useful contacts. Please give names and contact addresses of anyone else involved in the conservation of the site with whom you think the IBA programme should be in touch. Add a brief explanation of why they might be useful contacts.

Birds. Lists and records are welcome — of all species, but especially of those used to identify the IBA (globally or regionally-threatened, restricted-range, biome-restricted or congregatory). Details are given in the 'Important Bird Areas of Kenya'.

For all records, please include dates and (where possible) precise locations. For species that are hard to identify, brief notes on identification would be helpful. Counts of numbers are very useful for congregatory species.

Other fauna/flora. Any interesting records or new information. Especially useful are records for species whose presence or numbers reinforces the importance of the site, i.e. animals or plants that are endemic, threatened or otherwise of conservation significance.

Other notes. Please record any other information or explanation that you think is important, including any corrections to the data given in the existing site accounts.

Return the form and attached documents to Nature Kenya. E-mailed versions are welcome.

Continued from page 18

Local people who have traditionally had little to do with research and monitoring are now gaining ecological research skills that are helping them to keep track of changes of environmental conditions in ecosystems adjacent to them. The project aims at building the capacities of local people and key Government departments in monitoring biodiversity at IBAs, using birds as indicator species for changes in habitat conditions. About 70 people drawn from all 60 IBAs have acquired skills in species and habitat monitoring techniques. Five community groups have been visited for site-specific training sessions at Kinangop Grasslands, Kikuyu Escarpment, Mukurwe-ini Valleys, Papyrus Wetlands (Dunga and Yala Swamps), and Kakamega Forest. Three groups have already started monitoring and sending data from their IBAs. The project is also training key people at national level drawn from Kenya Wildlife Service, Forest Department, National Museums of Kenya, Community Based Organisations, and the National Environment Management Authority.

Participants in monitoring courses are trained in various methods of birds and vegetation survey. The programme is building trust, imparting new skills, entrenching an active force in the management of resources and instilling a sense of ownership.

Partners

Nature Kenya oversees this programme in close collaboration with the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), Forest Department (FD), Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and other Kenyan institutions represented on the IBA National Liaison Committee. Funding has come from the Darwin Initiative of the UK and technical support and funding has been provided by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (BirdLife International in the UK) and the BirdLife International Secretariat.

Sharpe's Longclaw chicks

Expected outcomes

- National site monitoring system established and covering all 60 IBAs, providing data for local and national indicators of environmental quality
- Detailed monitoring carried out at key IBAs feeding into improved management planning
- Effective feedback loops established between monitoring and national conservation action and reporting
- Conservation interventions made and management plans influenced as a result of threats or opportunities identified by monitoring
- Mechanisms identified and capacity built to sustain the collection and use of practical monitoring information in the longer term

REPORT BY DAN OMOLO

'Mass killings' of Birds! Friends of Kinangop cry foul

Birds are generally referred to as 'our feathered friends' and have wide appeal amidst young and old alike. Everywhere in the world, birds have great cultural significance and it is not uncommon for traditional dancers to wear beautiful feathers, for instance. Biologically, birds play a major role in the functioning of many ecosystems, particularly through pollination and seed dispersal, and birdwatch tourism is an important source of revenue. Birds also provide an excellent means for creating awareness among young people and the community and provide a good basis for the initiation of various conservation interventions.

But, some species of birds, notably the Red-billed Quelea have gained a notorious reputation as perpetrators of crop damage and have been classified as 'pests' under Kenyan wildlife statutes. This means that a mandated authority such as Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) can provide licences for the 'control' of this pest species. This 'control' is usually through the application of pesticides, which if not carried out properly can easily cause the poisoning and death, of other species.

In September 2003, Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FoKP), a local community SSG, brought to the attention of Nature Kenya, National Museums of Kenya and KWS, massive bird deaths in Kinangop. FoKP reported that a farmer in the area had commissioned the local agricultural office to eradicate a flock of Quelea that had invaded his farm and had applied pesticides.

Further investigation discovered that the pesticides were applied without following established chemical pest control procedures and without consulting a licencing institution such as KWS. The unfortunate result was the indiscriminate death of other species including Streaky Seedeater, Speckled Mousebird, Pied Crow, Cape Rook, Chin-spot Batis and African Harrier Hawk (photo above). Nearby farmers were also concerned that their livestock might graze on the contaminated area.

FoKP's alert led to KWS sending out a field officer from Naivasha to promptly investigate and report the incident. The farmer and the agricultural office that commissioned the pest control were questioned as to why they did not follow required procedures. This investigation illustrated major gaps in the legislative framework of pest control – for example, the ability of an agricultural office to proceed with chemical pest control without consulting with a licencing body.

FoKP's community crisis response strategy can be attributed, in part, to Nature Kenya's capacity building projects for SSGs. FoKP now has adequate understanding and training on biodiversity conservation issues, which in turn has enabled them to be proactive in instances such as the one illustrated here.

Monitoring Blue Swallows ...

PAUL KARIUKI NDANG'ANG'A
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Photo from the Int'l Blue Swallow Action Plan

The Blue Swallow migrates from Southern Africa to the open grasslands of western Kenya between April and September each year. The pockets of grasslands that it prefers for wintering are disappearing fast in Kenya and its only two known sites are Ruma National Park and the privately owned Busia Grasslands. Birders visiting the sites have on occasion reported seeing Blue Swallows, but information about their status was lacking. The Ornithology Department of the National Museums of Kenya, with support from Fauna & Flora International, were able to visit these two sites between late August and early September 2003.

The main activities included a census, estimates of cover, threats and condition of the grassland habitat, short interviews with landowners in Busia and management at Ruma National Park, and distribution of educational materials and posters.

At Ruma National Park observers counted swallows within 40 hectare belt transects as they slowly drove through access roads from the top of an open pick up. In Busia 10 hectare belt transects of grassland patches, distributed all over the private property, were visited on boda-bodas (bicycle taxis). All Blue Swallows and other swallows seen within the transects were counted, the group size and composition of Blue Swallows noted, while in the case of perching birds, the perch type and height of each was recorded. Sample points were randomly chosen throughout the transects and various vegetation and topographical variables recorded in order to try and understand the habitat preference of the bird. Open discussions with local community and rangers were held with the aim of creating awareness and seeking community support and involvement in the conservation issues relating to the Blue Swallow.

At Ruma an average of 36 birds were counted over the 16 transects, covering a total area of 640 ha within the park. We found that the birds were patchily distributed, but occurred in relatively high densities in localities where they were detected. The Blue Swallows had an average density of 2 individuals per 40-ha for the entire park, while no Blue Swallows were seen outside the park. The Blue Swallows were seen within areas that were flat and entirely covered by sparsely wooded grasslands with a low intensity of woody plants. The main woody species that occurred where the Blue Swallows were recorded included *Acacia xanthophloea*, *Balanites aegyptiaca* and *Acacia drepanolobium* but the precise points where the bird was located were all dominated by the third. Perched swallows were also seen on short dry/leafless *A. drepanolobium* that stood just slightly higher than the grass in the area. Grass, at a mean average of 1.5 meters, was dominated by *Themeda triandra*.

In Busia, a total of 21 Blue Swallows were recorded within 4 of the 31 grassland belt transects. Additonally, 10 grassland fragments were surveyed and Blue Swallows were recorded twice near Mungatsi market, along Walawatzi river and within a private farm at Kiseka. The Blue Swallows were seen within transects that were mainly covered by open grasslands but were interspersed with cultivation and thickets Perching Blue Swallows were seen on tall stands of grass, *Miscanthus violacea*, evidently the most dominant grass species in the area.

Blue Swallows illustrated by Edwin Selempo

All the grasslands within Ruma National Park were largely intact and unfragmented, flat and often wet, though not waterlogged. When the open and sparsely wooded grassland was interupted, it was by patches of *Acacia* woodlands, thickets and sparse trees as mentioned above. Most of the dense woodlands and thickets were found concentrated along the Lambwe Valley that traverses through the park. Grasslands in Busia face the threat of fragmentation, agriculture and overgrazing, and exist in fragments of varying sizes as small as half a hectare to as large as 50 hectares. Spread around the area, fragments were discovered mostly along streams, rivers and drainage lines. All of the fragments were found on wet land and surrounded by cultivation (mainly sugarcane and maize) and often co-existed with highly populated human settlements. Some fragments had been spared from cultivation by virtue of being waterlogged.

The results of this survey are quite important for bird conservation in Kenya since it confirms that good numbers of Blue Swallows still do use Ruma National Park and the private Busia grasslands sites during their non-breeding season. Substantial conservation efforts need to be invested especially in Busia to ensure that the grassland habitat does not continue to be lost.

Did you know? ...

The Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) is reputed to carry bones up to 30 meters overhead and then drops the bones to break them. The bird then flies down from the sky to feed on the extracted marrow and little pieces of bone. It does the same with tortoises to access the flesh. An ancient Greek dramatist Aeschylus is said to have been killed when a Lammergeier dropped a tortoise on him, mistaking his bald pate for a rock!

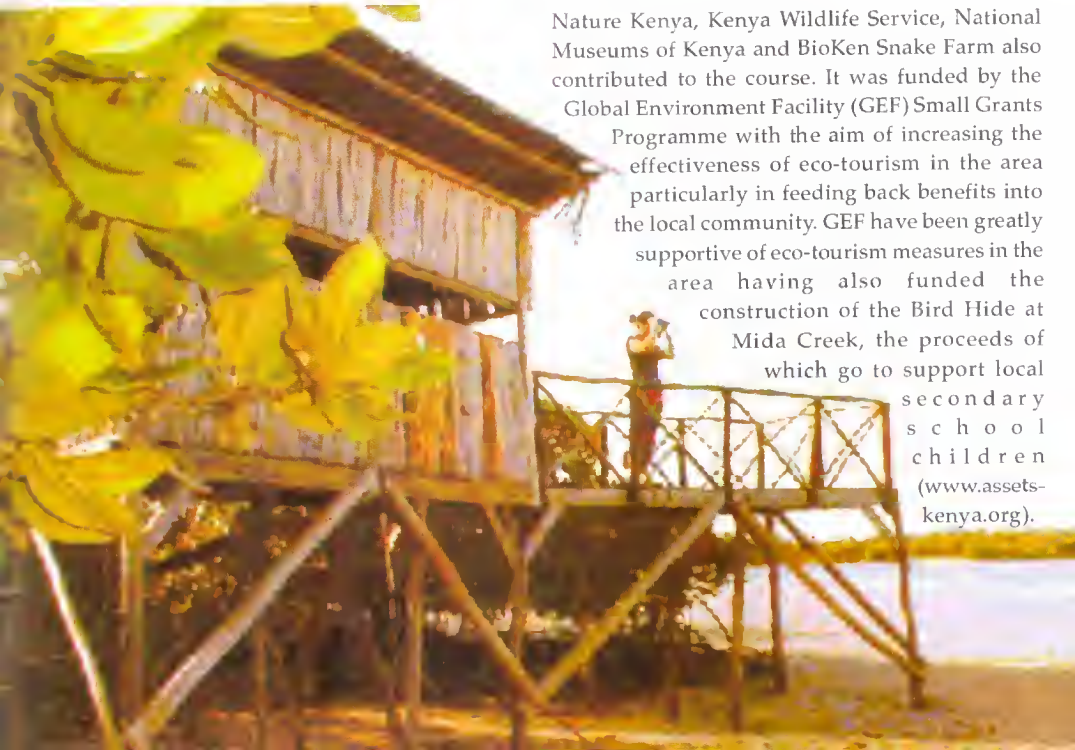
Creek and Forest Guiding

JACQUI KAYE
kenya@arocha.org

'The experience of wilderness reaches beyond the thrill of animal herds to touch the very soul of man.'
A guide in Kenya has this unique opportunity to allow her guests to be touched to their 'very soul', but before this is possible a guide must have some basic guiding skills. At Arabuko-Sokoke Forest and Mida Creek on Kenya's north coast, A Rocha Kenya has initiated a 'Creek and Forest Guide's Certificate Training Course', which will enable local guides to realise this goal.

The first of the three-part series of training sessions was held over one week in May 03 and covered guiding skills and techniques. Part II held in June and July, consisted of seven modules aimed at building up the guides' knowledge on various areas: from insects, spiders and mites to geography, history and culture. The third and final section was an intensive assessment using all of the skills, techniques and knowledge acquired. Of the twenty-one who first registered on the course, eighteen passed all three sections of the course and were awarded the Creek and Forest Guide's Certificate.

The course was designed and run by Matt Gurney, who has set up his own guide training company called Bush Logic and has trained guides in Mara for professional tour companies. His aim is not only to help train Kenyan guides to a high standard of professionalism, but also to ensure that they act as knowledgeable, responsible conservationists whilst out in the field. Matt explained the important role that the guides have as a link between conservation and the local communities. *"They are ideally placed as they are from the community themselves and can provide tangible benefits from the conservation of the forest and creek."*



Nature Kenya, Kenya Wildlife Service, National Museums of Kenya and BioKen Snake Farm also contributed to the course. It was funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of eco-tourism in the area particularly in feeding back benefits into the local community. GEF have been greatly supportive of eco-tourism measures in the area having also funded the construction of the Bird Hide at Mida Creek, the proceeds of which go to support local secondary school children (www.assets-kenya.org).

Highlights from the Chairman's AGM Report

Photo left of the meeting at Arabuko-Sokoke in June 2003 of Executive Committee, staff, committees and members to develop a new Nature Kenya strategy for the period 2004-2008

Nature Kenya

(The East Africa Natural History Society) May 02 to April 03

(Full version available on request)

by Dr. Ian Gordon, Chairman

Management

In the year 2002, the Executive Committee continued to apply the structural changes made in year 2001 and devolved more management responsibility to the senior staff Management team headed by the Executive Director.

Committees and projects

The 'Nature Kenya Committees and Projects Forum' continued to meet, discussing issues related to implementing the Nature Kenya Strategic Plan within a broader environmental agenda.

The **Environmental Policy and Legislation Working Group** (ELPWiG) is now actively implementing a project supporting forest policy work in Kenya. The group commissioned three expert analyses leading to a community guide to forest conservation in Kenya.

A **Herpetofauna Working Group** was established as a Committee of Nature Kenya and has since been very active working with Site Support Groups to monitor threatened amphibians.

The **Bird Committee** continued to publish the magazine *Kenya Birds* (available free on request with Nature Kenya membership) and the first of a series of glossy, informative checklists; and is taking part in the BirdLife International pilot KAGU project to develop a World Bird Database (and in the process updating the database in the Ornithology Department of the Museum).

The **Dudu Committee** has been actively working on the Insect Exhibit at the Museum's Snake Park and organizing regular well-attended wadudu walks.

All committees require some support to initiate the taxonomic broadening exercise moving from Important Bird Areas to Important Biodiversity Areas.

Membership and publications

Membership continues to hover around the one thousand mark. The increase in **sponsor members** is very welcome. The sponsor rate of Ksh 3000 paid by each sponsor contributes up to 18% of current membership income. Membership subscriptions currently cover about 45% of the cost of running services. This shows how much Nature Kenya is dependent on other sources of income, such as that provided by RSPB.

A brighter, livelier volume of the *EANHS Bulletin* (now renamed ***Nature East Africa***) and ***Kenya Birds***, now use colour. I encourage you to continue to make use of these publications to publish your field notes, research and observations. Two issues of the ***Journal of East African Natural History***, volumes 89 and 90, were published. Thank you, to the many contributing members who make ***Nature Net*** such interesting reading.

Cheli and Peacock Ltd sponsored the printing of a glossy, colourful cover and map for ***A Checklist of the Birds of Meru National Park*** and special thanks go to Gordon Boy, for his help in the production of this checklist.

Conservation Action

Nature Kenya continues to make a significant contribution to biodiversity conservation in Kenya. The site internship programme continues to make an impact at seven sites (Kakamega, Kikuyu Escarpment, South Nandi, Mt Kenya, Kinangop Grasslands, Mukurweini and Arabuko-Sokoke Forest).

In Mt Kenya the construction of an **Environmental Resource Centre** will commence in May 2003. In Kakamega the **Kakamega Environmental Education**

Programme collaborating with the Forest Department and other partners plan to construct a butterfly exhibit, tree house, resource centre, gift shop, snake display, bandas and other structures that help to improve ecotourism at **Kakamega Forest**.

Donors have been approached to support the implementation of the **strategic plan for Arabuko-Sokoke Forest**, while monitoring by the **Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides Association** with technical support from **ARocha Kenya** and other partners is ongoing.

In Kereita, the **Kijabe Environment Volunteers** (KENVO) made significant progress and impact on education and awareness, developing income generating ventures and replanting the forest and also addressing their own growth and focus.

In Mukurweini, the **Mukurweini Environmental Volunteers** group was established and is now active in the **conservation of Hinde's Babbler**. The group has chosen to use a **Volleyball tournament** for local clubs as an awareness raising and education tool.

The **Important Bird Areas monitoring system** at both local and national level was initiated with support coming from the **Darwin Initiative** through the RSPB. Community monitoring by SSGs is ongoing at three sites.

In December the five-year Important Bird Areas project funded by the GEF through UNDP, which started in 1998, came to an end. Although the project funding ended, on site initiatives are still ongoing with funding from other sources. The project takes pride in key successes:

* A national constituency for site conservation was established through the formation of a **National Liaison Committee** (NLC) comprised of twenty-four government and non-government institutions with representation from local communities.

*A national constituency for site conservation was also established through the formation and capacity building of twelve **Site Support Groups** (SSGs) at ten sites in Kenya.

* The Environmental Legislation and Policy Working Group (ELPWiG) was established as an objective of the GEF project.

* A national biodiversity monitoring scheme was set up and is currently being implemented by government departments with full involvement of SSGs.

Fund raising

On the fundraising front, proposal writing continued to take much emphasis. Nature Kenya defended a **proposal to USAID for Arabuko Sokoke Forest** and submitted a revised version in March 2003. **A project development concept** for Arabuko Sokoke submitted to **Kindernothilfe** was funded while the proposal for **improving livehoods** submitted to the **EU-BCP** was approved subject to some changes. A US$ 50,000 grant for the construction of the **Mt Kenya Eco-resource Centre**, at Mt Kenya will commence in May 2003. An SSGs communication and **Capacity Building** project has just been approved by **DANIDA** through the Danish Ornithological Society (the BirdLife Partner in Denmark).

The **Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund** (CEPF) of **Conservation International** funded Nature Kenya to lead the definition of conservation outcomes for the Eastern Arc and Coastal Forests in Kenya and Tanzania.

The Executive Committee approved a **business plan** on the Society's funding and sustainability challenges.

Advocacy

In **Policy and Advocacy** Nature Kenya continued to work with the Government and other key conservation bodies in Kenya. The Important Bird Areas National Liaison Committee (NLC) continued to be used as the main national networking and advocacy tool.

Nature Kenya was involved in the **Sixth Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity** (CBD-COP6) in the Netherlands and subsidiary meetings of the **Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA8)** in Canada as part of the government delegation. Nature Kenya also participated at the **World Summit for Sustainable Development** (WSSD) in August 2002 and the **Convention of Biological Diversity Clearing House Mechanism** (CBD CHM) in March 2003. The Executive Director is invited to attend a high level CBD meeting in London in May 2003 and thereafter in June 2003 a meeting in the Netherlands discussing the **World Parks Congress**. This is clear indication of the global recognition that Nature Kenya has received out of the very good work on the CBD. Thank you to the RSPB and BirdLife Secretariat for supporting Mr Paul Matiku (ED) to attend these meetings.

The Environmental Legislation and Policy Working Group (ELPWiG) is a major step towards turning round what has always looked like a too scientific Society with little emphasis on policy and legislation to an all round environmental agency. Nature Kenya has made significant contribution to national policy instruments including the constitutional review process, land law review process and the Forest Bill.

Administration

The ED and the senior staff Management team with a bigger portfolio for decision-making have proved their ability to manage the Society affairs with minimum guidance from the Executive Committee. Training for staff took advantage of BirdLife International and RSPB training opportunities. Nature Kenya has now approved the implementation of staff benefits scheme and staff salaries will be reviewed for implementation in May 2003.

Office space continued to be a limitation. Possibilities for Nature Kenya to erect an office block at the National Museums of Kenya were explored but there is no official position yet.

Photo of the Chairman, Ian Gordon (left), the Honorary Editor Lorna Depew (centre) and Chris Hill, Honorary Treasurer (right) at the Strategic Planning Meeting

Affiliations

Nature Kenya continues to house the **Tropical Biology Association**, which has continued its work in promoting training in field ecology. **EARTHWATCH** continued to offer fellowships to young scientists and naturalists nominated by Nature Kenya to attend some of its projects. Nature Kenya hosted the **Africa Division** of **BirdLife International** office for a few weeks (the Africa Secretariat is now based at the ICIPE grounds in Kasarani, Nairobi). Nature Kenya is now a member of Environment Liaison Centre International (**ELCI**) and Ecotourism Society of Kenya (**ESOK**), a member of the Management Committee of the **Kenya Forest Working Group**, and membership with World Conservation Union (**IUCN**) is being processed.

Nature Kenya continues its close collaboration with the **National Museums of Kenya**, which it founded in the last century, and its scientists in all natural history disciplines

Conserving the home of the Critically endangered Taita Thrush

JOHN MUSINA
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The forest remnants on the tops of the Taita Hills are home to three endemic and endangered bird species. Among them is the Taita Thrush *Turdus helleri*, a secretive, specialised ground-dwelling forest bird. These beautiful birds are found in only four forest fragments, Mbololo, Ngangao, Chawia and Yale, and their small population and range categorises them as critically endangered.

The Taita Thrush resembles the Olive Thrush, and for some time was considered conspecific with it. However, the Taita Thrush is darker above, with a redder bill and white belly and undertail coverts. The young bird has a heavily mottled breast. The song of the Taita Thrush is not well known, as it is often confused with the song of the Orange Ground Thrush, also found in the Taita forests.

Taita Thrushes feed, roost and nest in the indigenous forest, and do not normally venture into other habitats. They favour areas with dense forest understory and abundant insects. Individuals stay within their home range from year to year. The Taita Apalis (sometimes considered a race of the Bar-throated Apalis) and the Taita White-eye (sometimes considered a race of the Montane White-eye) are also found in these remnant forests.

The tiny size of the Taita Hills forests, and the dense human population surrounding them, make them extremely vulnerable. Most of the fragments are already heavily disturbed.

Conservation of these unique forests will requires integrated planning and action. Several initial steps are obvious. Those forests that have not yet been gazetted should become Nature Reserves, under the Forests Act, but even this status may not afford adequate protection. Kenyan law presently lacks provision for small nature reserves to be designated for their biodiversity importance. The draft new Museums and Heritage Bill, which has just been published, allows such sites to be gazetted as National Monuments. If this legislation comes into force, the Taita Hills forests would be an obvious place to apply it.

Plantations of exotic trees, mainly conifers, make up a substantial area of all major fragments. These plantations appear to be performing poorly. However, indigenous vegetation is regenerating underneath the canopy. Controlled felling that allows gradual natural forest regrowth could eventually increase the indigenous forest area substantially. At the same time, it is clear that the increasing, demand by the surrounding population for fuelwood, poles and other forest products cannot be met sustainably from the natural forests. Strict control of forest use is

needed, combined with agroforestry extension programmes to help people to meet these needs on-farm.

Some compensation for the loss of forest products might come from the development of ecotourism in the Taita hills. The hills are accessible and conveniently located near the main Nairobi-Mombasa Road. There are spectacular views from many places, and the forests have much to interest any naturalist (and certainly) any bird watcher. The forests are easy and safe to walk in - unlike many other sites, there are no dangers from the wild animals, and general security is good in the area. Sites like Ngangao and Chawia could be sensitively developed for visitors, with walking trails, information boards, trained local guides and accommodation at campsites or in guesthouses. Such an approach has been successful elsewhere in the world.

Kenya Forests Working Group, with input from Nature Kenya and the local community, recently completed a draft management plan for Ngangao Forest.

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Taita Thrush by Andrew Kamiti

The Driving forces at Sites

Francis Muigai
Site Intern & Member Friends of Kinangop Plateau South

Originally from Murang'a, Francis moved to South Kinangop in 1960. He owns about half a hectare of farmland where he farms cabbages, potatoes, carrots, and keeps some livestock.

Francis developed his appreciation of wildlife as a scout leader, but his involvement in conservation started when he was engaged by the Ethnography Department of the National Museums, to work on an ethno-ornithology and ethno-zoology project.

After two years with this project, he became a tour guide with the tour company Abercrombie & Kent and worked with them from 1990-1998. As a guide he traveled widely in Kenya and Tanzania and learnt to speak Japanese and some French. In 1999 however, Francis, like many others, fell victim to the very negative publicity that hit the tourism sector in Kenya that year.

In the many years that Francis was a guide he still made time to visit schools in South Kinangop to talk to classes on wildlife and its conservation. He also kept up his contacts with the Ornithology Department at the Museum and the Nature Kenya Wednesday Morning Birdwalks.

When Nature Kenya needed a Site Conservation Intern to work in South Kinangop in 1999, Francis's natural enthusiasm and experience made him an obvious choice. He has since formed the Friends of Kinangop Site Support Groups at Engineer, Njabini and Magumu-nyakio. He works 4-5 days with groups and schools, while continuing his farming. He facilitates and mentors members of the groups.

Francis says he is very pleased that the community is much more environmentally aware than before and knows about the endemic bird, Sharpe's Longclaw. He is also pleased that the 15-20 secondary and primary schools he is working with now have active wildlife clubs.

Francis would like to see the Kinangop community uplift their living standard through income generating projects that sustainably utilise natural resources, and he would like like to see Friends of Kinangop develop to very high level of administration, responsibility and knowledge.

Chege on the dais leading Friends of Mukurwe-ini Environment Volunteer on a town clean up

John Chege
Site Intern, Mukurwe-ini

In 2000, John Chege took up the challenge of initiating conservation initiatives for Hinde's Babbler – a bird species found in an area of about 20,000 ha around Mukurwe-ini. Chege comes from central Kenya, a region that is highly populated and intensely cultivated.

He has contributed to the formation of the Mukurweini Environment Volunteers (MEVO), an active conservation and drama group whose membership is drawn locally. Chege has trained this group to be a force in creating awareness to the local community and Hinde's Babbler monitoring activities. MEVO is now recognized by Nature Kenya as the official Site Support Group in the area. Chege has also laid foundations of a popular annual *Hinde's Babbler Volleyball Challenge Cup* that draws participants from the community. The competition is meant to create awareness and keep up Hinde's Babbler conservation morale.

Chege holds a degree in Wildlife Management and a Post Graduate Diploma in Education.

Hinde's Babbler by Andrew Kamiti

David Kuria (with hat) and otherKENVO members putting up bee hives

David Kuria
Member Kijabe Environment Volunteers

I was brought up on the periphery of a vast indigenous forest, interaction with which endeared me to nature and motivated me to pursue a degree in conservation and management of natural resources. While at university I developed a keen interest in community development and protection of biodiversity. Meanwhile, in my backyard, the splendid Kikuyu escarpment forest ecosystem was undergoing changes resulting from unsustainable human activities. The solution to these problems was to seek community intervention. With newly acquired skills from the university, I together with colleagues from the area rallied forest-adjacent communities from the Kijabe and Kereita forests to join hands in the plight to save our community's resources. This enthusiasm saw the establishment of the Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO) group in 1994. I have worked as the group Project Coordinator from then until 2003, when I won a scholarship to undertake my Masters Degree in the United Kingdom.

After almost ten years of voluntary work, I am happy that the government, the local community and NGOs have recognised and accepted our work. We have become a learning example. Discussing and making decisions with the community is very exciting especially when and where the majority are in agreement.

It has not been all plain sailing. The past political regime was suspicious of our activities. There have also been misunderstandings about project funds, from people who think it is for individual members, or from others who think we keep the funds for ourselves. It is heart breaking if the people you serve with commitment don't have faith in you, and at times you may feel like quitting. A lot of time is spent explaining to the community and KENVO members about the use of projects funds. But the formation of KENVO is great achievement. Through KENVO, the Kikuyu Forests are on the conservation map. This was not so a few years ago.

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David Ngala
Founding Member Arabuko Sokoke Forest Guides Association

David Ngala is an outstanding personality in the conservation of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. He grew up near it, worked in it as a driver for the Forest Department, studied its birds, and worked tirelessly for its preservation. Among his many contributions is the establishment of the Forest-Adjacent Dwellers Association (FADA), a local support group.

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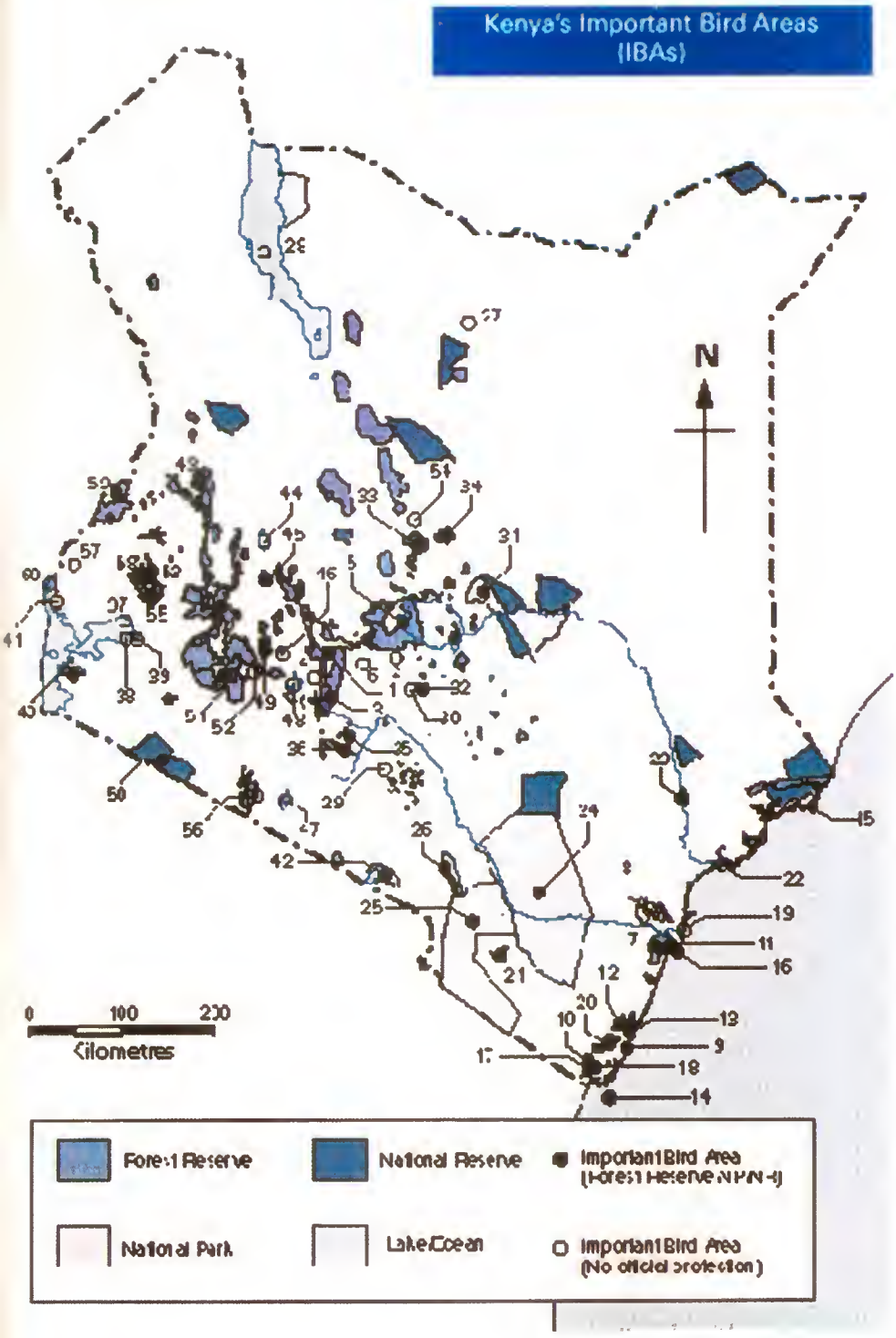
Key to IBA sites indicated on the map on the opposite page

1 Aberdare Mountains
2 Kianyaga Valleys
3 Kikuyu Escarpment Forest
4 Kinangop Grasslands
5 Mt Kenya
6 Mukurweini Valleys
7 Arabuko-Sokoke Forest
8 Dakatcha Woodland
9 Diani Forest
10 Dzombo Hill Forest
11 Gede Ruins National Monument
12 Kaya Gandini
13 Kaya Waa
14 Kisite Island
15 Kiunga Marine National Reserve
16 Mida Creek, Whale Island & Malindi/Watamu Coast
17 Marenji Forest
18 Mrima Hill Forest
19 Sabaki River Mouth
20 Shimba Hills
21 Taita Hills Forests
22 Tana River Delta
23 Tana River Forests
24 Tsavo East National Park
25 Tsavo West National Park
26 Chyulu Hills Forests
27 Dida Galgalu Desert
28 Lake Turkana
29 Machakos Valleys
30 Masinga Reservoir
31 Meru National Park
32 Mwea National Reserve
33 Samburu/Buffalo Springs National Reserves
34 Shaba National Reserve
35 Dandora Ponds
36 Nairobi National Park
37 Dunga Swamp
38 Koguta Swamp
39 Kusa Swamp
40 Ruma National Park
41 Yala Swamp
42 Amboseli National Park
43 Cherangani Hills
44 Lake Baringo
45 Lake Bogoria National Reserve
46 Lake Elmenteita
47 Lake Magadi
48 Lake Naivasha
49 Lake Nakuru National Park
50 Masai Mara
51 Mau Forest Complex
52 Mau Narok/Molo Grasslands
53 North Nandi Forest
54 Ol Donyo Sabache
55 South Nandi Forest
56 South Nguruman
57 Busia Grasslands
58 Kakamega Forest
59 Mt Elgon
60 Sio Port Swamp


Kenya's Important Bird Areas
(IBAs)
N
0
100
200
Kilometres
Forest Reserve
National Reserve
Important Bird Area
(Forest Reserve/NP/N-R)
National Park
Lake/Ocean
Important Bird Area
(No official protection)

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